Environmental Assessment for 1999 Elected Prescribed Fires
Bureau of Land Management
Lakeview District, Klamath Falls Resource Area

Project Title*: *Miller Creek and Frog Camp Prescribed Burns

NEPA Document Number: OR-014-99-08

Location of Projects (See Maps 1 and 2):
Miller Creek: T. 39 S., R.13 E., Sec. 12, 13, 14, 23 & 26 W.M. (350 acres)
(West of Gerber Reservoir.)

Frog Camp: T. 39 S., R.13 E., Sec. 12 & 13 W.M. (50 acres)
(West of Gerber Reservoir.)

BACKGROUND

The Miller Creek and Frog Camp Project areas have varied fuels ranging from grass, brush, juniper, and ponderosa pine. The lack of natural fire has created fuel loadings that could devastate the timber stand by uncontrollable wildfire. A wildfire in these fuels could reach intensities that jeopardize fire crew safety, the adjacent timber stands and critical habitat.

During Summer 1985, the Willow Wildfire burned the area to the southeast of the Miller Creek Project. The Paddock Wildfire, summer 1992, burned the area to the north of the Miller Creek Project. In the Spring of 1992, 45 acres were underburned in the Frog Camp area and 90 acres were underburned along the east side of Miller Creek form the dam down to Schnipps Valley. The Gerber Timber Sale harvested ponderosa pine in the Frog Camp project area and parts of the Miller Creek project area. Some of the logging slash was piled and the rest was lop and scatter.

Section 7 consultation (per the Endangered Species Act) will be conducted on the Frog Camp unit due to the location of a bald eagle nest in the area.

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

The general affected environment is described in Chapter 3 of the Klamath Falls Resource Area Resource Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement.

Miller Creek: Forest vegetation is an uneven-aged eastside ponderosa pine stand intermixed with western juniper. There have been timber sales in the past where the treatment was lop and scatter, but this method did nothing to reduce fuel loadings.

Frog Camp: Forest vegetation is an uneven-aged eastside ponderosa pine stand intermixed with western juniper. There have been timber sales in the past where the treatment was lop and scatter, but this method did nothing to reduce fuel loadings. The Frog Camp elected burn area has a bald eagle roosting site (the bald eagle is Federally listed as threatened).

Cultural Resources: Sites will be identified and protected. There will be no fire line dug unless line is needed to stop spread or to protect cultural sites.

NEED FOR PROPOSED ACTION

The need for fire use on the landscape, as discussed in EA #OR-014-94-09, is to:

Reintroduce fire into areas where fire can influence ecosystem composition, structure, and function.

Restore sustainable function and structure to plant communities to improve forest health in fire-adapted ecosystems.

Reduce potential for catastrophic wildfire (that could result in major losses of sustainable ecosystem resources) in areas having heavy fuel loadings and vegetation changes that developed with fire exclusion.

Reduce overall fire management cost by reducing the number of large acreage multi-burn period fires.

Reduce the number and type of suppression resources needed in extended attack and project fire situations.

DESCRIPTION OF ALTERNATIVES

Two action alternatives were developed to present a range of actions for managing the vegetation on approximately 400 acres that have a potential for wildfire. Those two alternatives and the no action alternative are described below.

Alternative A - Proposed Action

Under the Proposed Action, Management Ignited Prescribed Fire would be used to achieve the overall objectives stated above. Specifically, in these two areas, the fuel loadings would provide wildfire suppression opportunities. These areas were elected (as opposed to the random process described in EA#OR-014-94-09) to achieve presuppression fuels treatment.

There would be three entries to achieve the objectives. The first entry would be a spring entry to reduce tree mortality and reduce the chance of consuming all the duff. The second entry would

be a spring entry to limit tree mortality, maintain duff retention, and the grass will be present to retain soil. The third entry would be a fall entry to reduce the 1000 hour fuels. This would set the stand up for random maintenance.

Project Design Features Specific to Alternative A:

Fire trails would be constructed by hand crews, where necessary.
The Frog Camp Unit with the eagle nest would be burned in the fall to avoid impacting the eagle nesting season.

These project design features would be in addition to those listed for all alternatives.

Alternative B - Handpile and Burn

Some areas with concentrated fuels at Miller Creek and Frog Camp could be handpiled. At the two burn areas, brush could be cut with small mechanical devices and hand piled. Hand piles would be burned in the fall after sufficient curing.

(Note: This alternative would have a high implementation cost due to the amount of slash concentrations.)

Alternative C - No Action (Catastrophic Fire Occurence)

Under Alternative C, the two areas would not be treated. Vegetation would be allowed to continue growing, dying, and accumulating.

PROJECT DESIGN FEATURES COMMON TO ALL ALTERNATIVES

Best Management Practices for soils and water and other resources identified in the Klamath Falls Resource Area's RMP will be followed.

If any additional cultural/plant surveys done prior to the proposed burns provide information to the contrary, the project would be dropped or modified and Section 7 consultation would be initiated as required.

All landowners adjacent to proposed burn units will be notified 30 days prior to implementation of prescribed burn.

To prevent additional noxious weeds from spreading into the Klamath Falls Resource Area, all equipment will be cleaned prior to operating on BLM-administered lands. All

dirt, grease, and plant parts that may carry noxious weed seeds or vegetative parts are required to be removed; removal may be accomplished with a pressure hose.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

In general, impacts associated with elected burns would be the same as those described for random burns in Environmental Assessment#OR-014-94-09 on fire management.

The Proposed Action (Alternative A) would mimic natural forces by creating a mosaic of burned and unburned areas, which would change the fuel loading and future fire behavior. The resulting mosaic would benefit big game habitat by diversifying the vegetation that is available for food and for cover. There is a trade-off regarding air quality, because a planned and executed prescribed fire would impact air quality for a short time, but avoid more detrimental smoke impacts associated with an unplanned wildfire event. Soil disturbance and compaction associated with fire trail construction would be minimal.

Previous burning projects completed in the same geographical area (DeVaul and Norcross), which have similar affected environment, provide examples of expected impacts expected with Alternative A.

The Paddock Wildfire is a good example of expected impacts associated with the No Action (Alternative E).

Resources Not Expected to be Impacted: None of the critical resource elements listed below are expected to be impacted by any of the alternatives, primarily due to the absence of the resources on the proposed buming areas.

Air Quality
Area of Critical Environmental Concern
Cultural Resources
Prime Farmlands
Floodplains
Native American Religious Concerns
Wastes (Hazardous/Solid)
Water Quality
Wetlands/Riparian Zones
Wild & Scenic Rivers
Wilderness
Special Status Plant Species

Residual Impacts Where Prescribed Fire is Used:

Fire trails would be visible from the air.
Waterbars on fire trails would reduce any erosion.

Economic Considerations:
Alternative B would have high costs associated to the amount of slash concentrations.

Alternative C (No Action):
If no action were taken, excessive fuel loadings could contribute to increased fire intensity in the event of a wildfire. Such fire potential could jeopardize crew safety during wildfire control efforts, potentially impacting private and national forest lands.

CONSULTATIONS

The Oregon Department of Forestry and the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife have been consulted about the proposed burning. All adjacent landowners will be notified 30 days prior to implementation of prescribed fire.

The Klamath Falls Resource Area's Interdisciplinary Team reviewed the proposal (see attached signature page).

CONFORMANCE WITH APPLICABLE LAND USE PLANS

The proposed project is expected to conform with the following land use plans:

Klamath Falls Resource Area Management Plan/Record of Decision (June 2, 1995)(RMP)

Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (FSEIS) on Management for Late-Successional and Old-Growth Forest Related Species Within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl (also referred to as the Northwest Forest Plan), April 13, 1994.

Klamath Falls Resource Area Fire Management EA #OR-014-94-09 (June 10, 1994)

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT AND DECISION RECORD

I have reviewed this environmental assessment, including the three alternatives and their environmental impacts, and have determined that burning for fuels reduction is in conformance with the Klamath Falls Resource Area RMP. Futher, it is my determination that implementation of the Proposed Action (Alternative A) would not have any significant impacts on the human environment and that an environmental impact statement is not required.

This determination of no significant impact is based on the analysis in EA#OR014-94-9 and the project design features in this environmental assessment, including among others the use of Best Management Practices for soils and water and other resources, and notification of adjacent landowners. Another consideration for my determination is that the absence of prescribed fire in these areas could result in wild fires that alter the ecosystem in ways that result in undesirable cumulative effects.

Based on these determinations, it is my decision to implement Alternative A (Proposed Action) as provided in this environmental assessment.

____/s./ Richard Mayberyy_____ ___3/24/99___
Richard W. Mayberry, Acting Area Manager, Klamath Falls Resource Area Date